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SUBJECT: UNION OF KURDISTAN WOMEN IN SULAIMANIYAH

This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) Cable.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The Zhinan Union of Kurdistan Women (ZUKW) supports the rights of Kurds to self-determination and freedom and the opportunity for women to exercise a broad range of civic and legal rights. ZUKW is supported by Iraqi public and international agencies and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On March 29, RRTOff met with Kafia Suleiman, Founding Member and Head of the ZUKW, as well as Shawbo Askari, Public Relations Officer of the ZUKW, in their offices in Sulaimaniyah. The two ZUKW members said the organization had positively impacted the 1959 Iraqi Law of Personal Status, which no longer allows a lighter sentence for men committing homicide as an honor killing. On July 16, 2005, the ZUKW submitted modifications for the draft Iraqi constitution to protect the rights of women. However, ZUKW members note they have not received feedback on their recommendations.

13. (SBU) The cause of ZUKW, Suleiman and Askari noted, includes peaceful means for conflict resolutions and prohibition on the use of weapons of mass destruction and mines. They said that since 1989 the ZUKW has run a shelter for women which hosts six to ten women on a regular basis. The ZUKW also raises awareness of women with respect to medical issues and treatment as well as legal rights and sources of legal advice. The ZUKW has a wide range of programs designed to develop the role of women in education, art, health, and business, the two ZUKW members noted one project involves providing financial assistance to households headed by women in Koysinjaq so they can keep their livestock and not sell it for food.

14. (SBU) According to Suleiman and Askari, ZUKW has about 50,000 members. The Union is open to all women regardless of political affiliation. It receives funding from Iraqi government sources, the UN and the UK government. In addition, Jalal Talabani, Secretary General of the PUK and the President of Iraq, also provides support for ZUKW. A new office building of the ZUKW in Sulaimaniyah is under construction and will include a guest house, handicraft area, sports facilities, media and printing facilities, and a nursery.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

14. (SBU) Kafia Suleiman is the wife of Omar Fatah, Deputy Prime Minister for the Kurdistan Regional Government. She holds a physics degree from the Baghdad University. From 1970 to 1985, Suleiman was a high school teacher. From 1985 to 1991, she was an active member of the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga (militia) force. During the period 1992-1999, Suleiman was the Minister of Municipality in Sulaimaniyah Province (PUK) when Kosrat Rasoul was the Prime Minister of the PUK's KRG. In 1989, she founded the Kurdistan Union of Women - Zhinan and remains active in the Union. She is a close colleague and friend of the Talabani family, in particular, Hero Talabani, the wife of Jalal Talabani, with whom she founded the ZUKW.